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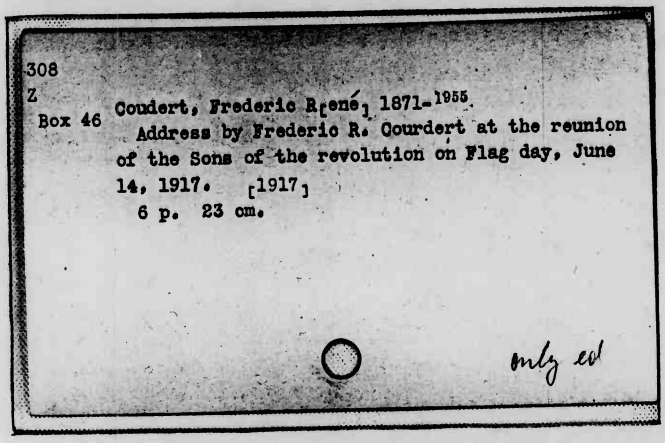
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JUN 27 1917

ADDRESS

by

FREDERIC R. COUDERT

308
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Box 46

At the Reunion of the Sons of the Revolution
on Flag Day, June 14, 1917

ADDRESS AT THE REUNION OF THE SONS OF THE REVOLUTION AT FRAUNCES' TAVERN, NEW YORK CITY, JUNE 14, 1917.

In the life of a nation, as in that of an individual, there come at rare periods certain decisions of vital import. Until last April we were confronted with the question whether America would deliberately elect to take part in the greatest armed conflict that has yet raged among men. That hour was the most solemn that had confronted this nation since the firing upon Fort Sumter. For months past we had heard the counsels of timidity, the admonitions of avarice, the wailings of cowardice mingling with the Prussian propaganda, all usually concealed under phrases "with pleasing and sonorous sound," counselling inaction.

The President of the United States with a patience almost Lincolnian had adopted every reasonable and honorable expedient to preserve peace while endeavoring to seek an adjustment which might have averted war.

For two and a half years we had argued and debated—some crying "FORWARD" and some crying "BACK." Every motive and every impulse seemed bent upon creating discord, until men both at home and abroad began to wonder whether America after all was really a nation. Some affected to believe that the national elements gathered on our soil from all quarters of the earth had not yet developed any true national consciousness, and that our value in the world as a force for right was at an end. These, indeed, were men of little vision; they had forgotten that long stretch of history dating from the Boston Tea Party to the expulsion of Spanish misgovernment from the West Indies. Yet debate and discussion were until that moment not only legitimate but even necessary. The President of the United States, true to the traditions of the nation and the spirit of the Constitution had again and again announced that he was merely the spokesman of the American people. How could the voice of the nation be articulated by its Chief Executive until all grades and shades of opinion had had opportunity to make themselves felt; nay more! it was the duty of those having honest convictions to express them in order that when all were thrown into the melting pot of public opinion the resultant might indeed express the final judgment of a great people. In the end the cause was fully tried out at the bar of opinion, and the verdict of America through Congress and the President definitely, irrevocably rendered.

Today the time for debate, criticism, academic discussion is over. It is the time for action. There can be no turning back. The impugning of motives, the palliation of acts of the public enemy, the captious criticism of Government have now become

quasi treasonable. The Government must and will be sustained by the unanimity of America. It is our duty to look forward, not backward, to realize that the nation has spoken and that the President is straining with might and main to carry out the national will. As the men of the Revolution stood behind Washington in the sad, solemn days when the nation's independence hung in the balance, as the people of the Northern States stood behind Lincoln in the dark moments when disunion threatened to undue the work of the fathers, so today must every American regardless of racial or other antecedent, stand firm behind the President of the United States, in the great endeavor to bring order and justice out of the hideous world chaos and to save everything that is best in American life and thought for a future and a better world.

The American people had been charged by their enemies with being sordid lovers of money, actuated solely by commercial motive. Never was the German statescraft with all its ponderous science and labored data farther afield than in this easy assumption. The cold, sinister, soulless men-machines who dominate the *Wilhelm Strasse* have not sufficient intuition nor understanding of the mind of a free people to realize what the soul of America is.

Had they studied with any appreciative sense the pages of our Revolutionary history they would scarce have blundered into the belief that America would not fight where there was no material profit; they would have learned that America has always fought for an ideal dissociated from mere material gain, just as she is now doing.

Your ancestors of the Revolution had nothing to gain, save Freedom, everything to lose save honor. Lord Acton that most eminent of recent English historians, speaking of the tax on tea, one of the immediate causes of the Revolution says that the British Government made it a mere nominal tax so that in reality tea became much cheaper in the Colonies than in England.

> "The sordid purpose was surrendered on our side and only the Constitutional motive was retained in the belief that the sordid element alone prevailed in the Colonies. *That three pence broke up the British Empire.* * * * By the rules of right which had been obeyed till then, England had the better cause. By the principle which was then inaugurated England was in the wrong, and the future belonged to the Colonies."

As the roundheads of Cromwell struck down the divine right of Kings, so the men of the American Colonies struck down the divine right of Parliaments, and consecrated the

elements of individual liberty in our written Constitution as something above either King or Parliament. In both instances English speaking men had struck one of those epoch-making blows for freedom, which revolutionize the world. Naseby and Yorktown must ever stand together as the monumental battles preserving the great traditions of English freedom, older than Magna Charta itself, from which come our Constitution and our institutions.

Eighty-five years later the dragon seed of slavery ripened and again the hour had struck for America. Again individual liberty, based as it was on national integrity hung in the balance. Sordid material considerations counselled compromise, postponement, peace at any price. Honor, conscience, high intelligence, great inherited traditions decreed that it must be WAR—even fratricidal. Thus again did America prove the faith of her people in things better than mere life—those that alone make life really worth living.

More than half a century of growth, prosperity and power made it appear as though the nation had finally won all that generations of men had striven for, and that at last we might rest content to enjoy the fruits won by preceding generations. In July, 1914, war appeared to have become an anachronism, a survival from a ruder age soon to be banished from the concerns of civilization.

Almost in a day the whole dream was shattered. The greatest military power that has appeared upon the stage of history had, with brutal atheistic cynicism, thrown aside the mask and openly decreed by its word and act that all that men in America, England and France had fought for during the past two centuries was illusion. Force based on science, greed backed by Krupp guns, Kultur which knows no ruth, a Government which knows no God save the Moloch German state, had, by the destruction of peaceful neutralized Belgium, struck down in one day the cornerstone of the public law of Europe and issued a challenge to modern Christian civilization.

For the third time in history it fell to the lot of France to stem the Barbarian tide. Once before upon the Marne, Aetius with a Gallic Army stopped the Hun under Attila. Three hundred years later Charles Martel at Tours saved Europe from becoming Saracen, just as in September, 1914, more than eleven centuries later, General Joffre with the citizen soldiery of France upon that same Marne saved Europe from the heel of the Prussianized Teuton, the reign of brute force and the religion of the Moloch State. These were among the world's "check battles." Yet the flood of barbarism was only checked at the Marne, not broken; again the flood rose and pressed on to be stopped once

more at Verdun—the Gateway of France—in the greatest of human conflicts yet seen.

America was a spectator but not an indifferent one. Once again mere momentary material interest counselled abstention; precedent was invoked to justify isolation and indifference. The timid, the ignorant, the disloyal, those to whom physical life was more precious than the dictates of conscience, counselled "peace and prosperity." Many began to wonder if America had a soul and was indeed worth saving as the policy of "Terrorism" on land following that of "Terrorism" on the high seas seemed to leave us indifferent. Yet the same spirit, as of yore, dominated the nation. The people of America at last understood that it was not any particular rule of law, but the existence of law itself, divine and human, that was involved.

The President in an indictment, never more justly nor more powerfully drafted against any Government expressed the conscience of America as truly as that same conscience had spoken in the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Ah! That was a great decision. I believe world history hung in the balance. As France checked the barbarian inroad and with England has for three years contained it, so now American hosts must with their French and English allies give to the Monster Despotism a death blow which will assure to Europe and the world for long years the reign of law and the supremacy of the individual conscience.

To those who have not closely followed the evolution, not to say revolution in our public opinion, the adoption by Congress of the military plan based upon general service or conscription would seem to be almost miraculous. Inherent prejudice against an army had blinded our people to the fact that it was not an army that was dangerous, but the source from whence it was recruited, and the purpose to which it was put. A great democracy can only find security in a democratic army based upon equality of obligation.

The fight for principle has been won. Let us have a care that in the administration of this great military measure the well-to-do unhesitatingly share the burden with their less fortunate neighbors; nothing could discredit the system so much as any attempt at evasion by the wealthier members of our community. If general service has been in principle adopted it is because it appealed to the sense of justice of Americans that all should serve alike regardless of every consideration—save fitness. If this law be evaded or administered without regard to its essential principle of equal justice a blow will be dealt universal service from which it might not easily recover. The conduct of the war would thereby be made much more difficult and a sense of resentment be created throughout the community.

The volunteer system is essentially aristocratic. Those who enjoy privilege should properly be the first to bear the burden. Where the law gives no privilege the burden should be distributed equally. It is for the natural leaders in the community; it is for those who are more favored by education and property to see that a just law operating equally leads to a just result; that the son of the wealthy banker equally with the son of the village blacksmith may both discharge the same obligation under the same flag.

The task confronting the nation is a stupendous one. Let there be no illusion. The war may well be long and painful, beyond expression, but the past few weeks have taught us that the nation will bear the strain with that same courage and enduring perseverance as in the past, following the example of the Fathers and inspired by the traditions of the American Revolution, this people will stand like a stone wall with our splendid Ally of old and of today—France—and with Great Britain from whence came our institutions, to end forever the Hohenzollern system of blood and iron so that a better future may come to Europe and America, one in which peace may be builded upon a guaranty of justice and law—a world order in which fundamental moral postulates and human rights may never again be set at defiance at the behest of mere material force, however scientifically organized.

To France, has fallen the honor of checking, to Britain the burden of containing by sea and land, to America now comes the duty of finally overthrowing that common enemy of democratic institutions and ordered liberty, the foe whose morality knows no ruth, whose philosophy admits no check upon the "will to power."

In France the traveler passing along the roads to the Northeast leading to Lorraine may see at every cross-road a great index finger pointing to the single word VERDUN. To many thousands, nay, hundreds of thousands of men passing over these roads in the five fateful months of critical battle, these six letters spelled mutilation or death, yet the word was an inspiration to heroism in every home of France, and from every corner of the land men followed that great index finger pointing, as it did indeed, to the modern Calvary.

Today at every cross-road must we here in America set up a great index hand with the words "TO FRANCE." To France, land of suffering humanity in whose devasted fields again must be saved the same principles for which Americans fought at Bunker Hill, at Saratoga, at Yorktown, at Gettysburg and in the Wilderness; to France, where the fate of the world is still pending; to France, which has again checked the Huns of the modern world as it did those of the ancient;

to France, the manhood of this nation must be now directed, to save the heritage of the American Revolution and the Civil War, to preserve the dearest conquests of the Christian civilization; to France will our men go by the thousands, hundreds of thousands, if need be by the million, to prove that the soul of America is more completely intent upon battling for the right than ever before, intent that slavery in another but far subtler and more dangerous form may not prevail upon the earth.

Dated,

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